

# Cybersecurity Innovation for Cyberinfrastructure (CICI)

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## PROGRAM SOLICITATION

NSF 21-512

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## REPLACES DOCUMENT(S):

NSF 19-514

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National Science Foundation

Directorate for Computer and Information Science and Engineering  
Office of Advanced Cyberinfrastructure

**Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

January 08, 2021

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND REVISION NOTES

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This solicitation updates the Cybersecurity Innovation for Cyberinfrastructure (CICI) solicitation [NSF 19-514](#). The CICI program continues to support the goal of a secure scientific workflow. The current solicitation:

- Renames and updates the Secure Scientific Cyberinfrastructure program area to Usable and Collaborative Security for Science;
- Adds two new program areas: Research Scientific Security Datasets, and Scientific Infrastructure Vulnerability Discovery; and
- Removes the Collaborative Security Response Center and Research Data Protection program areas.

Any proposal submitted in response to this solicitation should be submitted in accordance with the revised *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) ([NSF 20-1](#)), which is effective for proposals submitted, or due, on or after June 1, 2020.

## SUMMARY OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

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### General Information

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**Program Title:**

Cybersecurity Innovation for Cyberinfrastructure (CICI)

**Synopsis of Program:**

The objective of the Cybersecurity Innovation for Cyberinfrastructure (CICI) program is to develop, deploy and integrate solutions that benefit the broader scientific community by securing science data, workflows, and infrastructure. CICI recognizes the unique nature of modern, rapid collaborative science and the breadth of security expertise, infrastructure and requirements among different practitioners, researchers, and scientific projects. CICI seeks projects in three program areas:

1. **Usable and Collaborative Security for Science (UCSS):** Projects in this program area should support novel and applied security and usability research that facilitates scientific collaboration, encourages the adoption of security into the scientific workflow, and helps create a holistic, integrated security environment that spans the entire scientific CI ecosystem.
2. **Reference Scientific Security Datasets (RSSD):** Projects in this program area should capture the unique properties of scientific workflows and workloads as reference data artifacts to support reproducible security research and protect the scientific process.
3. **Scientific Infrastructure Vulnerability Discovery (SIVD):** Projects in this program area should develop and apply techniques to proactively discover vulnerabilities and weaknesses in scientific infrastructure.

**Cognizant Program Officer(s):**

*Please note that the following information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.*

- Robert Beverly, Program Director, CISE/OAC, telephone: (703) 292-7068, email: [rbeverly@nsf.gov](mailto:rbeverly@nsf.gov)
- Kevin Thompson, Program Director, CISE/OAC, telephone: (703) 292-4220, email: [kthomps@nsf.gov](mailto:kthomps@nsf.gov)

**Applicable Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):**

- 47.070 --- Computer and Information Science and Engineering

## Award Information

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**Anticipated Type of Award:** Standard Grant or Continuing Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 10 to 15

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$5,000,000 to \$7,500,000

Total funding for the CICI program is \$5,000,000 to \$7,500,000, subject to the availability of funds. All three program areas, UCSS, RSSD, and SIVD, will be supported at up to \$500,000 total per award for up to three years.

## Eligibility Information

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### Who May Submit Proposals:

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

### Who May Serve as PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

### Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

There are no restrictions or limits.

### Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI:

An individual can participate as PI, co-PI or senior personnel on no more than two CICI proposals. Note that any individual whose biographical sketch is provided as part of the proposal will be considered as Senior Personnel in the proposed activity, irrespective of whether that individual will receive financial support from the project.

In the event that any individual exceeds this limit, any proposal submitted to this solicitation with this individual listed as PI, co-PI, or Senior Personnel after the second proposal is received at NSF will be returned without review. No exceptions will be made.

## Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

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### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

- **Letters of Intent:** Not required
- **Preliminary Proposal Submission:** Not required
- **Full Proposals:**
  - Full Proposals submitted via FastLane: *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) guidelines apply. The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).
  - Full Proposals submitted via Research.gov: *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) guidelines apply. The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).
  - Full Proposals submitted via Grants.gov: *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov* guidelines apply (Note: The *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)).

### B. Budgetary Information

- **Cost Sharing Requirements:**

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.
- **Indirect Cost (F&A) Limitations:**

Not Applicable
- **Other Budgetary Limitations:**

Not Applicable

### C. Due Dates

- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

January 08, 2021

## Proposal Review Information Criteria

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### Merit Review Criteria:

National Science Board approved criteria. Additional merit review criteria apply. Please see the full text of this solicitation for further information.

## Award Administration Information

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### Award Conditions:

Standard NSF award conditions apply.

### Reporting Requirements:

Standard NSF reporting requirements apply.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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Scientific research infrastructure poses unique security and privacy challenges. Scientific workloads are frequently different than their non-scientific counterparts, while complex and unique software and hardware can present vulnerabilities not found in traditional environments. Collaboration and sharing are integral to the scientific enterprise but must adhere to security policies and regulations while providing as seamless as possible of a workflow to domain scientist users. Scientific data and computation are encumbered with a variety of different security constraints, and solutions to protecting data, computation, and workflows must both balance and expose these trade-offs. This solicitation broadly addresses securing scientific research infrastructure and the application of security to advance scientific initiatives, projects, and collaborations.

## II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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Securing scientific infrastructure is vital for multiple stakeholders. Operators wish to protect their infrastructure from abuse and denial of service, and being the source of attacks or otherwise becoming a liability to the infrastructure owners. Policy makers seek to promote science while ensuring that sensitive research data, e.g., medical patient records or the intellectual property itself, cannot be exfiltrated or stolen. The research community and public must have confidence in the integrity and authenticity of the data along every step of the computational workflow to ensure rigorous science and trust in the results. Meanwhile, domain scientists in fields as varied as physical and life sciences, require high-availability from the infrastructure and guarantees that their data and research are protected. However, scientific users may consider security valuable only insofar as it does not slow or impede their research. Ensuring the usability of security mechanisms is therefore critical to their adoption and use within the scientific community.

Scientific data and workloads can be fundamentally different than those seen in traditional network, storage, and computing scenarios. Individual platforms,

projects, and data may have significantly different security sensitivities and constraints. Similarly, scientific experiments frequently employ unique hardware and custom software that may be less well vetted or present entirely new classes of vulnerabilities. Solutions to protecting scientific data, computation, and workflows must thus both balance and expose these trade-offs while accommodating a variety of policies and stakeholders. The objective of the Cybersecurity Innovation for Cyberinfrastructure (CICI) program is to develop, deploy, and integrate security, privacy, and usability solutions that benefit the wider scientific community.

This solicitation seeks novel approaches to securing scientific data, workflows, and infrastructure while explicitly considering usability and the nature of modern scientific collaboration. Applied research and development that creates new understanding of scientific infrastructure security properties, advances the security of science infrastructure, or discovers vulnerabilities in existing infrastructure are welcome.

The CICI program targets applied security research directly relevant to scientific infrastructure and discovery. CICI is not the appropriate mechanism for non-security infrastructure efforts. It is also not intended to provide support for fundamental cybersecurity or privacy research; such projects may be better served as submissions to the [Secure and Trustworthy Cyberspace \(SaTC\)](#) program.

**CICI comprises three Program Areas outlined below:**

### **1. Usable and Collaborative Security for Science (UCSS)**

The modern scientific enterprise requires rapid, flexible, and reliable collaboration among participants from varied backgrounds who are using distributed infrastructure and working on problems with a variety of security requirements. The sharing of resources, whether computation or data, is integral to the scientific process and significant infrastructure exists to facilitate such collaboration. The security and availability of end-to-end scientific workflows is crucial to the integrity, speed of discovery, and reproducibility of scientific results. However, collaborative science can face security and privacy policy constraints, and obstacles that impede progress.

Many collaborative scientific experiments are complex and may include participants from multiple institutions, national labs or organizations physically distributed across campuses, sites or countries. Complex technical relationships may exist between users, institutions and information technology service providers, but security is a shared requirement. Domain scientists may lack the knowledge and background to secure workflows and meet security policy guidelines.

This program area seeks novel and applied security and usability research that facilitates scientific collaboration, encourages the adoption of security into the scientific workflow, and helps create a holistic, integrated security environment that spans the entire scientific CI ecosystem. Work in this space should specifically address overcoming security obstacles to data and resource sharing in current infrastructure and projects, and how to enable domain scientists to more easily and seamlessly integrate security considerations into their scientific workflow. Such usability efforts might explicitly take human factors into account and allow scientists to reason over the trade-off between their research goals and security and privacy concerns specific to the research domain. Proposals in this sub-area are encouraged to identify new collaborations and functionality that will be enabled by the proposed security or privacy mechanisms.

A proposal in this area must demonstrate that the proposed effort responds to the needs of the science and engineering communities and serves to advance scientific discoveries, collaborations, and innovations. Proposers must document explicit partnerships or collaborations with one or more domain scientists, research groups, or information technology (IT) support organizations. Partnership documentation from personnel not included in the proposal as PI, co-PI, or senior personnel should be in the form of a letter of collaboration included in the Supplementary Documents section of the proposal.

Proposers are encouraged to explain the threat model upon which the proposed solution is predicated. For reference on a threat model for Open Science, please refer to the [Open Science Risk Profile \(OSRP\)](#).

A sustainability plan describing how the proposed system will be supported beyond the project duration must be included.

Any software developed under proposed activities must be made available under an open source license. Proposals must state which software license will be used for any released software, and why this license has been chosen.

### **2. Reference Scientific Security Datasets (RSSD)**

Scientific workflows are frequently different than their non-science counterparts, and may induce different workloads. For instance, data from a science instrument or sensor may present a unique traffic distribution on the network or load on a cluster. Better understanding of the distinct properties of these workloads can help advance the state of the art in reproducible security and protection of the scientific process. While work toward developing data collection methods is welcome, emphasis will be placed on the data artifacts. Proposals in this sub-area should consider ways to produce publicly available canonical datasets of scientific network or computational meta-data as well as its storage and curation.

All proposals in this area must document explicit partnerships or collaborations with one or more domain scientists, research groups, or IT support organizations. Partnership documentation from personnel not included in the proposal as PI, co-PI, or senior personnel should be in the form of a letter of collaboration included in the Supplementary Documents section of the proposal.

A Systems Architecture Diagram(s) and a Project Plan (total 5 pages for both documents) must be included as Supplementary Documents.

### **3. Scientific Infrastructure Vulnerability Discovery (SIVD)**

Scientific research infrastructure has its own ecosystem of network, computation, and software, and a variety of methods for securing and protecting it. Proposals in this sub-area should provide techniques to proactively discover vulnerabilities and weaknesses in scientific infrastructure, including, but not limited to: red-teaming; fuzzing; penetration testing; and bug bounties. Such efforts must consider the ethical and operational concerns of the work, including obtaining explicit consent and collaboration of the entities under test and processes for informed disclosure. Proposals are encouraged to leverage existing security testbeds and testing frameworks in support of vulnerability discovery.

All proposals should include a description of:

- Existing scientific infrastructure and distributed scientific environments that will benefit from the proposed research or specific science drivers for creating new security infrastructure;
- How the proposed security mechanisms or infrastructure enhancements will benefit scientific applications and users;
- Any unique properties of the scientific domain or infrastructure that influence the desired security functionality, design, or mechanisms;
- The threat model in the science domain being considered; and
- A plan for gathering quantitative metrics to assess the security benefits anticipated from the proposed work.

Proposals should seek to develop solutions that augment existing infrastructure and are applied in nature. In addition to novel research, proposals may apply current state-of-the-art techniques in any of the four previously outlined focus areas to targeted science environments. Successful proposals will have a working

component or prototype that can be evaluated against quantitative metrics where possible. Proposers are encouraged to consider the sustainability of the effort in addition to broader impacts and science outcomes. Funded activities under CICI should identify opportunities for community and student engagement, as well as benefits to science and engineering communities beyond initial targets, including underrepresented communities, and education and workforce development.

### III. AWARD INFORMATION

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**Anticipated Type of Award:** Continuing Grant or Standard Grant

**Estimated Number of Awards:** 10-15

**Anticipated Funding Amount:** \$5,000,000 - \$7,500,000

Total funding for the CICI program is \$5,000,000 to \$7,500,000, subject to the availability of funds. All three program areas, UCSS, RSSD, and SIVD, will be supported at up to \$500,000 total per award for up to three years.

Estimated program budget, number of awards and average award size/duration are subject to the availability of funds.

### IV. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

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#### Who May Submit Proposals:

Proposals may only be submitted by the following:

- Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) - Two- and four-year IHEs (including community colleges) accredited in, and having a campus located in the US, acting on behalf of their faculty members. Special Instructions for International Branch Campuses of US IHEs: If the proposal includes funding to be provided to an international branch campus of a US institution of higher education (including through use of subawards and consultant arrangements), the proposer must explain the benefit(s) to the project of performance at the international branch campus, and justify why the project activities cannot be performed at the US campus.
- Non-profit, non-academic organizations: Independent museums, observatories, research labs, professional societies and similar organizations in the U.S. associated with educational or research activities.

#### Who May Serve as PI:

There are no restrictions or limits.

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per Organization:

There are no restrictions or limits.

#### Limit on Number of Proposals per PI or Co-PI:

An individual can participate as PI, co-PI or senior personnel on no more than two CICI proposals. Note that any individual whose biographical sketch is provided as part of the proposal will be considered as Senior Personnel in the proposed activity, irrespective of whether that individual will receive financial support from the project.

In the event that any individual exceeds this limit, any proposal submitted to this solicitation with this individual listed as PI, co-PI, or Senior Personnel after the second proposal is received at NSF will be returned without review. No exceptions will be made.

#### Additional Eligibility Info:

Collaborative proposals submitted from different organizations, with each organization requesting a separate award, are not allowed. Instead, proposals involving multiple organizations must be submitted as a single proposal, in which a single award is being requested (with subawards administered by the lead organization).

### V. PROPOSAL PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

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#### A. Proposal Preparation Instructions

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**Full Proposal Preparation Instructions:** Proposers may opt to submit proposals in response to this Program Solicitation via FastLane, Research.gov, or Grants.gov.

- Full proposals submitted via FastLane: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the general guidelines contained in the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg). Paper copies of the PAPPG may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov). Proposers are reminded to identify this program solicitation number in the program solicitation block on the NSF Cover Sheet For Proposal to the National Science Foundation.

Compliance with this requirement is critical to determining the relevant proposal processing guidelines. Failure to submit this information may delay processing.

- Full Proposals submitted via Research.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the general guidelines contained in the *NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide* (PAPPG). The complete text of the PAPPG is available electronically on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg). Paper copies of the PAPPG may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov). The Prepare New Proposal setup will prompt you for the program solicitation number.
- Full proposals submitted via Grants.gov: Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation via Grants.gov should be prepared and submitted in accordance with the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide: A Guide for the Preparation and Submission of NSF Applications via Grants.gov*. The complete text of the *NSF Grants.gov Application Guide* is available on the Grants.gov website and on the NSF website at: ([https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=grantsgovguide](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=grantsgovguide)). To obtain copies of the Application Guide and Application Forms Package, click on the Apply tab on the Grants.gov site, then click on the Apply Step 1: Download a Grant Application Package and Application Instructions link and enter the funding opportunity number, (the program solicitation number without the NSF prefix) and press the Download Package button. Paper copies of the Grants.gov Application Guide also may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).

See PAPPG Chapter II.C.2 for guidance on the required sections of a full research proposal submitted to NSF. Please note that the proposal preparation instructions provided in this program solicitation may deviate from the PAPPG instructions.

The following information supplements the guidelines and requirements in the NSF PAPPG and NSF Grants.gov Application Guide:

**Proposal Titles:** Proposal titles should begin with **CICI** followed by a colon, then the program area acronym followed by a colon, then the title of the project. Select one of the three program area acronyms below:

- Usable and Collaborative Security for Science: **UCSS**;
- Reference Scientific Security Datasets: **RSSD**; or
- Scientific Infrastructure Vulnerability Discovery: **SIVD**.

For example, if you are submitting a Usable and Collaborative Security for Science proposal, then your title would be: **CICI:UCSS:title**.

**Project Description:** Refer to Section II. Program Description, for additional information about requirements for each of the three program areas.

#### **Supplementary Documents:**

Supplementary Documents are limited to the specific types of documentation listed in the PAPPG, with exceptions specified below.

*1. List of Project Personnel and Partner Organizations (Note - In proposals with subawardee organizations, only the organization submitting the proposal should provide this information):* Provide current, accurate information for **all personnel and organizations involved in the project**. NSF staff will use this information to manage reviewer selection. The list should include all PIs, co-PIs, Senior Personnel, paid/unpaid Consultants or Collaborators, subawardees, postdoctoral researchers, and project-level advisory committee members. This list should be numbered, in alphabetical order by last name, and include for each entry (in this order) Full name, Organization(s), and Role in the project, with each item separated by a semi-colon. Each person listed should start a new numbered line. For example:

1. Mary Adams; XYZ University; PI
2. John Brown; University of PQR; Senior Personnel
3. Jane Green; XYZ University; Postdoctoral researcher
4. Bob Jones; ABC Inc.; Paid Consultant
5. Tim White; ZZZ University; Subawardee

*2. Letters of Collaboration:* Refer to Section II. Program Description, for additional information about requirements for each of the three program areas.

*3. Project Plan:* Each proposal should include a Project plan of up to 5 pages are allowed.

**Refer to Section II. Program Description, for additional Supplementary Document requirements for each of the three program areas.**

#### **Single Copy Documents:**

*Collaborators and Other Affiliations Information:*

Proposers should follow the guidance specified in [Chapter II.C.1.e](#) of the NSF PAPPG. Submitters using Grants.gov may upload this document as a PDF.

## **B. Budgetary Information**

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#### **Cost Sharing:**

Inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited.

#### **Budget Preparation Instructions:**

Budgets should include travel funds for the project principal investigators and other team members, as appropriate, from all collaborating organizations to attend one annual Principal Investigators' meeting each year the award is active.

## **C. Due Dates**

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- **Full Proposal Deadline(s)** (due by 5 p.m. submitter's local time):

January 08, 2021

## D. FastLane/Research.gov/Grants.gov Requirements

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### For Proposals Submitted Via FastLane or Research.gov:

To prepare and submit a proposal via FastLane, see detailed technical instructions available at: <https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/a1/newstan.htm>. To prepare and submit a proposal via Research.gov, see detailed technical instructions available at: [https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=research\\_node\\_display&\\_nodePath=/researchGov/Service/Desktop/ProposalPreparationandSubmission.html](https://www.research.gov/research-portal/appmanager/base/desktop?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=research_node_display&_nodePath=/researchGov/Service/Desktop/ProposalPreparationandSubmission.html). For FastLane or Research.gov user support, call the FastLane and Research.gov Help Desk at 1-800-673-6188 or e-mail [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov) or [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov). The FastLane and Research.gov Help Desk answers general technical questions related to the use of the FastLane and Research.gov systems. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this funding opportunity.

### For Proposals Submitted Via Grants.gov:

Before using Grants.gov for the first time, each organization must register to create an institutional profile. Once registered, the applicant's organization can then apply for any federal grant on the Grants.gov website. Comprehensive information about using Grants.gov is available on the Grants.gov Applicant Resources webpage: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants.html>. In addition, the NSF Grants.gov Application Guide (see link in Section V.A) provides instructions regarding the technical preparation of proposals via Grants.gov. For Grants.gov user support, contact the Grants.gov Contact Center at 1-800-518-4726 or by email: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov). The Grants.gov Contact Center answers general technical questions related to the use of Grants.gov. Specific questions related to this program solicitation should be referred to the NSF program staff contact(s) listed in Section VIII of this solicitation.

**Submitting the Proposal:** Once all documents have been completed, the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) must submit the application to Grants.gov and verify the desired funding opportunity and agency to which the application is submitted. The AOR must then sign and submit the application to Grants.gov. The completed application will be transferred to the NSF FastLane system for further processing.

Proposers that submitted via FastLane or Research.gov may use Research.gov to verify the status of their submission to NSF. For proposers that submitted via Grants.gov, until an application has been received and validated by NSF, the Authorized Organizational Representative may check the status of an application on Grants.gov. After proposers have received an e-mail notification from NSF, Research.gov should be used to check the status of an application.

## VI. NSF PROPOSAL PROCESSING AND REVIEW PROCEDURES

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Proposals received by NSF are assigned to the appropriate NSF program for acknowledgement and, if they meet NSF requirements, for review. All proposals are carefully reviewed by a scientist, engineer, or educator serving as an NSF Program Officer, and usually by three to ten other persons outside NSF either as *ad hoc* reviewers, panelists, or both, who are experts in the particular fields represented by the proposal. These reviewers are selected by Program Officers charged with oversight of the review process. Proposers are invited to suggest names of persons they believe are especially well qualified to review the proposal and/or persons they would prefer not review the proposal. These suggestions may serve as one source in the reviewer selection process at the Program Officer's discretion. Submission of such names, however, is optional. Care is taken to ensure that reviewers have no conflicts of interest with the proposal. In addition, Program Officers may obtain comments from site visits before recommending final action on proposals. Senior NSF staff further review recommendations for awards. A flowchart that depicts the entire NSF proposal and award process (and associated timeline) is included in PAPPG Exhibit III-1.

A comprehensive description of the Foundation's merit review process is available on the NSF website at: [https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit\\_review/](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/merit_review/).

Proposers should also be aware of core strategies that are essential to the fulfillment of NSF's mission, as articulated in *Building the Future: Investing in Discovery and Innovation - NSF Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years (FY) 2018 – 2022*. These strategies are integrated in the program planning and implementation process, of which proposal review is one part. NSF's mission is particularly well-implemented through the integration of research and education and broadening participation in NSF programs, projects, and activities.

One of the strategic objectives in support of NSF's mission is to foster integration of research and education through the programs, projects, and activities it supports at academic and research institutions. These institutions must recruit, train, and prepare a diverse STEM workforce to advance the frontiers of science and participate in the U.S. technology-based economy. NSF's contribution to the national innovation ecosystem is to provide cutting-edge research under the guidance of the Nation's most creative scientists and engineers. NSF also supports development of a strong science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) workforce by investing in building the knowledge that informs improvements in STEM teaching and learning.

NSF's mission calls for the broadening of opportunities and expanding participation of groups, institutions, and geographic regions that are underrepresented in STEM disciplines, which is essential to the health and vitality of science and engineering. NSF is committed to this principle of diversity and deems it central to the programs, projects, and activities it considers and supports.

## A. Merit Review Principles and Criteria

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The National Science Foundation strives to invest in a robust and diverse portfolio of projects that creates new knowledge and enables breakthroughs in understanding across all areas of science and engineering research and education. To identify which projects to support, NSF relies on a merit review process that incorporates consideration of both the technical aspects of a proposed project and its potential to contribute more broadly to advancing NSF's mission "to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense; and for other purposes." NSF makes every effort to conduct a fair, competitive, transparent merit review process for the selection of projects.

### 1. Merit Review Principles

These principles are to be given due diligence by PIs and organizations when preparing proposals and managing projects, by reviewers when reading and evaluating proposals, and by NSF program staff when determining whether or not to recommend proposals for funding and while overseeing awards. Given that

NSF is the primary federal agency charged with nurturing and supporting excellence in basic research and education, the following three principles apply:

- All NSF projects should be of the highest quality and have the potential to advance, if not transform, the frontiers of knowledge.
- NSF projects, in the aggregate, should contribute more broadly to achieving societal goals. These "Broader Impacts" may be accomplished through the research itself, through activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. The project activities may be based on previously established and/or innovative methods and approaches, but in either case must be well justified.
- Meaningful assessment and evaluation of NSF funded projects should be based on appropriate metrics, keeping in mind the likely correlation between the effect of broader impacts and the resources provided to implement projects. If the size of the activity is limited, evaluation of that activity in isolation is not likely to be meaningful. Thus, assessing the effectiveness of these activities may best be done at a higher, more aggregated, level than the individual project.

With respect to the third principle, even if assessment of Broader Impacts outcomes for particular projects is done at an aggregated level, PIs are expected to be accountable for carrying out the activities described in the funded project. Thus, individual projects should include clearly stated goals, specific descriptions of the activities that the PI intends to do, and a plan in place to document the outputs of those activities.

These three merit review principles provide the basis for the merit review criteria, as well as a context within which the users of the criteria can better understand their intent.

## 2. Merit Review Criteria

All NSF proposals are evaluated through use of the two National Science Board approved merit review criteria. In some instances, however, NSF will employ additional criteria as required to highlight the specific objectives of certain programs and activities.

The two merit review criteria are listed below. **Both** criteria are to be given **full consideration** during the review and decision-making processes; each criterion is necessary but neither, by itself, is sufficient. Therefore, proposers must fully address both criteria. (PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d(i). contains additional information for use by proposers in development of the Project Description section of the proposal). Reviewers are strongly encouraged to review the criteria, including PAPPG Chapter II.C.2.d(i), prior to the review of a proposal.

When evaluating NSF proposals, reviewers will be asked to consider what the proposers want to do, why they want to do it, how they plan to do it, how they will know if they succeed, and what benefits could accrue if the project is successful. These issues apply both to the technical aspects of the proposal and the way in which the project may make broader contributions. To that end, reviewers will be asked to evaluate all proposals against two criteria:

- **Intellectual Merit:** The Intellectual Merit criterion encompasses the potential to advance knowledge; and
- **Broader Impacts:** The Broader Impacts criterion encompasses the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired societal outcomes.

The following elements should be considered in the review for both criteria:

1. What is the potential for the proposed activity to
  - a. Advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields (Intellectual Merit); and
  - b. Benefit society or advance desired societal outcomes (Broader Impacts)?
2. To what extent do the proposed activities suggest and explore creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts?
3. Is the plan for carrying out the proposed activities well-reasoned, well-organized, and based on a sound rationale? Does the plan incorporate a mechanism to assess success?
4. How well qualified is the individual, team, or organization to conduct the proposed activities?
5. Are there adequate resources available to the PI (either at the home organization or through collaborations) to carry out the proposed activities?

Broader impacts may be accomplished through the research itself, through the activities that are directly related to specific research projects, or through activities that are supported by, but are complementary to, the project. NSF values the advancement of scientific knowledge and activities that contribute to achievement of societally relevant outcomes. Such outcomes include, but are not limited to: full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); improved STEM education and educator development at any level; increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology; improved well-being of individuals in society; development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce; increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others; improved national security; increased economic competitiveness of the United States; and enhanced infrastructure for research and education.

Proposers are reminded that reviewers will also be asked to review the Data Management Plan and the Postdoctoral Researcher Mentoring Plan, as appropriate.

## Additional Solicitation Specific Review Criteria

All proposals must clearly address the following solicitation-specific review criteria:

- **Science-driven:** To what extent is the proposed project science-driven? How will the project outcomes fill well-recognized science and engineering needs of the research community? What will be the broader impacts of the project, such as its benefits to science and engineering communities beyond its initial targets, under-represented communities, and education and workforce development? The project description should provide a compelling discussion of the potential to benefit its intended as well as broader communities.
- **Innovation:** To what extent is the proposed project innovative? What innovative and transformational capabilities will the project bring to its target communities? How will the project integrate innovation and discovery into the project activities?
- **Close collaborations among stakeholders:** To what extent does the proposed project involve close collaborations among stakeholders? How will the project activities engage cyberinfrastructure (CI) experts, specialists, and scientists working in concert with the relevant domain scientists who are users of CI?
- **Building on existing, recognized capabilities:** To what extent does the proposed project build on existing, recognized capabilities? How will the project activities build on and leverage existing NSF, national, and open source cyberinfrastructure and cybersecurity investments, as appropriate?
- **Project plans, and system and process architecture:** How well detailed are the project plans, and logical and physical architectures? The project plan should include user interactions and provide a timeline including a proof-of-concept demonstration or prototyping of the proposed system or framework.
- **Sustained impact:** What potential does the proposed work have for providing benefits beyond the participants and the lifetime of the award?

## B. Review and Selection Process

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Proposals submitted in response to this program solicitation will be reviewed by Ad hoc Review and/or Panel Review.

Reviewers will be asked to evaluate proposals using two National Science Board approved merit review criteria and, if applicable, additional program specific criteria. A summary rating and accompanying narrative will generally be completed and submitted by each reviewer and/or panel. The Program Officer assigned to manage the proposal's review will consider the advice of reviewers and will formulate a recommendation.

After scientific, technical and programmatic review and consideration of appropriate factors, the NSF Program Officer recommends to the cognizant Division Director whether the proposal should be declined or recommended for award. NSF strives to be able to tell applicants whether their proposals have been declined or recommended for funding within six months. Large or particularly complex proposals or proposals from new awardees may require additional review and processing time. The time interval begins on the deadline or target date, or receipt date, whichever is later. The interval ends when the Division Director acts upon the Program Officer's recommendation.

After programmatic approval has been obtained, the proposals recommended for funding will be forwarded to the Division of Grants and Agreements for review of business, financial, and policy implications. After an administrative review has occurred, Grants and Agreements Officers perform the processing and issuance of a grant or other agreement. Proposers are cautioned that only a Grants and Agreements Officer may make commitments, obligations or awards on behalf of NSF or authorize the expenditure of funds. No commitment on the part of NSF should be inferred from technical or budgetary discussions with a NSF Program Officer. A Principal Investigator or organization that makes financial or personnel commitments in the absence of a grant or cooperative agreement signed by the NSF Grants and Agreements Officer does so at their own risk.

Once an award or declination decision has been made, Principal Investigators are provided feedback about their proposals. In all cases, reviews are treated as confidential documents. Verbatim copies of reviews, excluding the names of the reviewers or any reviewer-identifying information, are sent to the Principal Investigator/Project Director by the Program Officer. In addition, the proposer will receive an explanation of the decision to award or decline funding.

## VII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

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### A. Notification of the Award

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Notification of the award is made to *the submitting organization* by a Grants Officer in the Division of Grants and Agreements. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible by the cognizant NSF Program administering the program. Verbatim copies of reviews, not including the identity of the reviewer, will be provided automatically to the Principal Investigator. (See Section VI.B. for additional information on the review process.)

### B. Award Conditions

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An NSF award consists of: (1) the award notice, which includes any special provisions applicable to the award and any numbered amendments thereto; (2) the budget, which indicates the amounts, by categories of expense, on which NSF has based its support (or otherwise communicates any specific approvals or disapprovals of proposed expenditures); (3) the proposal referenced in the award notice; (4) the applicable award conditions, such as Grant General Conditions (GC-1)\*; or Research Terms and Conditions\* and (5) any announcement or other NSF issuance that may be incorporated by reference in the award notice. Cooperative agreements also are administered in accordance with NSF Cooperative Agreement Financial and Administrative Terms and Conditions (CA-FATC) and the applicable Programmatic Terms and Conditions. NSF awards are electronically signed by an NSF Grants and Agreements Officer and transmitted electronically to the organization via e-mail.

\*These documents may be accessed electronically on NSF's Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award\\_conditions.jsp?org=NSF](https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/award_conditions.jsp?org=NSF). Paper copies may be obtained from the NSF Publications Clearinghouse, telephone (703) 292-8134 or by e-mail from [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov).

More comprehensive information on NSF Award Conditions and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the NSF *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at [https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub\\_summ.jsp?ods\\_key=pappg](https://www.nsf.gov/publications/pub_summ.jsp?ods_key=pappg).

### C. Reporting Requirements

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For all multi-year grants (including both standard and continuing grants), the Principal Investigator must submit an annual project report to the cognizant Program Officer no later than 90 days prior to the end of the current budget period. (Some programs or awards require submission of more frequent project reports). No later than 120 days following expiration of a grant, the PI also is required to submit a final project report, and a project outcomes report for the general public.

Failure to provide the required annual or final project reports, or the project outcomes report, will delay NSF review and processing of any future funding increments as well as any pending proposals for all identified PIs and co-PIs on a given award. PIs should examine the formats of the required reports in advance to assure availability of required data.

PIs are required to use NSF's electronic project-reporting system, available through Research.gov, for preparation and submission of annual and final project reports. Such reports provide information on accomplishments, project participants (individual and organizational), publications, and other specific products and impacts of the project. Submission of the report via Research.gov constitutes certification by the PI that the contents of the report are accurate and complete. The project outcomes report also must be prepared and submitted using Research.gov. This report serves as a brief summary, prepared specifically for the public, of the nature and outcomes of the project. This report will be posted on the NSF website exactly as it is submitted by the PI.

More comprehensive information on NSF Reporting Requirements and other important information on the administration of NSF awards is contained in the NSF *Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* (PAPPG) Chapter VII, available electronically on the NSF Website at

## VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

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Please note that the program contact information is current at the time of publishing. See program website for any updates to the points of contact.

General inquiries regarding this program should be made to:

- Robert Beverly, Program Director, CISE/OAC, telephone: (703) 292-7068, email: [rbeverly@nsf.gov](mailto:rbeverly@nsf.gov)
- Kevin Thompson, Program Director, CISE/OAC, telephone: (703) 292-4220, email: [kthomps@nsf.gov](mailto:kthomps@nsf.gov)

For questions related to the use of FastLane or Research.gov, contact:

- FastLane and Research.gov Help Desk: 1-800-673-6188
- FastLane Help Desk e-mail: [fastlane@nsf.gov](mailto:fastlane@nsf.gov)
- Research.gov Help Desk e-mail: [rgov@nsf.gov](mailto:rgov@nsf.gov).

For questions relating to Grants.gov contact:

- Grants.gov Contact Center: If the Authorized Organizational Representatives (AOR) has not received a confirmation message from Grants.gov within 48 hours of submission of application, please contact via telephone: 1-800-518-4726; e-mail: [support@grants.gov](mailto:support@grants.gov).

## IX. OTHER INFORMATION

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The NSF website provides the most comprehensive source of information on NSF Directorates (including contact information), programs and funding opportunities. Use of this website by potential proposers is strongly encouraged. In addition, "NSF Update" is an information-delivery system designed to keep potential proposers and other interested parties apprised of new NSF funding opportunities and publications, important changes in proposal and award policies and procedures, and upcoming NSF [Grants Conferences](#). Subscribers are informed through e-mail or the user's Web browser each time new publications are issued that match their identified interests. "NSF Update" also is available on [NSF's website](#).

Grants.gov provides an additional electronic capability to search for Federal government-wide grant opportunities. NSF funding opportunities may be accessed via this mechanism. Further information on Grants.gov may be obtained at <https://www.grants.gov>.

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

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The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent Federal agency created by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended (42 USC 1861-75). The Act states the purpose of the NSF is "to promote the progress of science; [and] to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare by supporting research and education in all fields of science and engineering."

NSF funds research and education in most fields of science and engineering. It does this through grants and cooperative agreements to more than 2,000 colleges, universities, K-12 school systems, businesses, informal science organizations and other research organizations throughout the US. The Foundation accounts for about one-fourth of Federal support to academic institutions for basic research.

NSF receives approximately 55,000 proposals each year for research, education and training projects, of which approximately 11,000 are funded. In addition, the Foundation receives several thousand applications for graduate and postdoctoral fellowships. The agency operates no laboratories itself but does support National Research Centers, user facilities, certain oceanographic vessels and Arctic and Antarctic research stations. The Foundation also supports cooperative research between universities and industry, US participation in international scientific and engineering efforts, and educational activities at every academic level.

*Facilitation Awards for Scientists and Engineers with Disabilities (FASSED)* provide funding for special assistance or equipment to enable persons with disabilities to work on NSF-supported projects. See the *NSF Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide* Chapter II.E.6 for instructions regarding preparation of these types of proposals.

The National Science Foundation has Telephonic Device for the Deaf (TDD) and Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) capabilities that enable individuals with hearing impairments to communicate with the Foundation about NSF programs, employment or general information. TDD may be accessed at (703) 292-5090 and (800) 281-8749, FIRS at (800) 877-8339.

The National Science Foundation Information Center may be reached at (703) 292-5111.

The National Science Foundation promotes and advances scientific progress in the United States by competitively awarding grants and cooperative agreements for research and education in the sciences, mathematics, and engineering.

To get the latest information about program deadlines, to download copies of NSF publications, and to access abstracts of awards, visit the NSF Website at <https://www.nsf.gov>

- **Location:**

2415 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22314

**For General Information** (NSF Information Center): (703) 292-5111

• **TDD (for the hearing-impaired):** (703) 292-5090

• **To Order Publications or Forms:**

Send an e-mail to: [nsfpubs@nsf.gov](mailto:nsfpubs@nsf.gov)

or telephone: (703) 292-8134

• **To Locate NSF Employees:** (703) 292-5111

## PRIVACY ACT AND PUBLIC BURDEN STATEMENTS

The information requested on proposal forms and project reports is solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950, as amended. The information on proposal forms will be used in connection with the selection of qualified proposals; and project reports submitted by awardees will be used for program evaluation and reporting within the Executive Branch and to Congress. The information requested may be disclosed to qualified reviewers and staff assistants as part of the proposal review process; to proposer institutions/grantees to provide or obtain data regarding the proposal review process, award decisions, or the administration of awards; to government contractors, experts, volunteers and researchers and educators as necessary to complete assigned work; to other government agencies or other entities needing information regarding applicants or nominees as part of a joint application review process, or in order to coordinate programs or policy; and to another Federal agency, court, or party in a court or Federal administrative proceeding if the government is a party. Information about Principal Investigators may be added to the Reviewer file and used to select potential candidates to serve as peer reviewers or advisory committee members. See [System of Record Notices, NSF-50](#), "Principal Investigator/Proposal File and Associated Records," and [NSF-51](#), "Reviewer/Proposal File and Associated Records." Submission of the information is voluntary. Failure to provide full and complete information, however, may reduce the possibility of receiving an award.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, an information collection unless it displays a valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 3145-0058. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 120 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions. Send comments regarding the burden estimate and any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to:

Suzanne H. Plimpton  
Reports Clearance Officer  
Office of the General Counsel  
National Science Foundation  
Alexandria, VA 22314

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